

Simple Parliamentary Procedure

Guidelines for Better Business Meetings

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Have you ever been to an out-of-control meeting? A meeting where two or three items were discussed at once? A meeting where you never had a chance to express your views? A meeting where a vote was never taken and, in the end, the president made the final decision? Chances are you and several other members left the meeting feeling as if nothing was accomplished.

Meetings don't have to be that way. An orderly, well conducted meeting, on a community, county, area, or state basis, should be the goal of every officer and member. In order for a presiding officer to conduct a good business meeting, the entire membership should be informed of parliamentary procedure. Parliamentary procedure helps the officers and members follow a logical order in conducting a meeting.

Each member should consider the five principles of parliamentary law:

- Courtesy and justice to all.
- Consider only one thing at a time.
- The majority rules.
- The minority must be heard.
- The purpose is to facilitate action.

20.1. Parliamentary Courtesies

Courtesies are expected of all members.

1. Stand when addressing the president, as in making a motion, discussing a question before the house, or making a committee report.
2. Address the president as "Madam Chairman" or "Madam President."
3. Sit down promptly when finished talking.
4. Do not speak during the business meeting except when addressing the chair and then only after having been properly recognized.
5. Never talk or whisper to another member during the meeting.
6. Never stand to get recognition from the president when another member has the floor.
7. Confine discussion to the question before the group.
8. Refer to an officer by her official title, to members by "the member who spoke last" or otherwise designate members, but not by their names.
9. Willingly accept the decision of the majority.

10. Be punctual for club meetings.

20.2. Reminders for the Presiding Officer

1. Correct procedure should always be your goal.
2. If dealing with motions or amendments, always state the exact wording. Ask the secretary to read it if you forget how it was phrased.
3. Discussion is not in order until the motion has been stated by the chair.
4. The chair does not enter discussion while presiding. As a member of the assembly, the chair is entitled to his or her vote.
5. Always indicate clearly how a vote is to be taken. Never call for "the usual sign."
6. Always call for the negative vote, saying, "Those opposed say 'no.'"
7. Adoption of an amendment does not mean adoption of the main motion. Remember to state the main motion as amended.
8. It is better to say: "The motion is out of order" than "The member is out of order."

20.3. Order of Business

An order of business or agenda is simply a plan for conducting the business of the group in a logical, organized manner. An agenda helps a meeting go smoother and faster, and lessens the possibility of items of business being overlooked or forgotten. Every meeting should have an agenda. A typical agenda or order of business is discussed below.

20.4. Agenda

1. *Call to Order.* The president calls the meeting to order after he has determined a quorum is present. The president says, "The meeting will come to order."
2. *Opening Ceremonies.* Religious, patriotic, or other opening ceremonies prescribed by the organization, including a roll call if customary, are held at this time. Religious ceremonies, such as an invocation, precede other activities. The roll call should be the last part of the opening ceremonies.

Note: Program may be inserted here (See #9).

3. *Reading of the Minutes.* The chair asks the secretary to read the minutes. Following the reading the chair asks, "Are there any corrections to the minutes?"

The chair responds, "The minutes are approved as read," or "as corrected."

4. *Reports of Officers and Standing Committees.* The chair recognizes officers who have reports. The secretary is asked to read correspondence. The treasurer is asked to give the treasurer's report. Any other elected officers who may have reports are called upon. If the chair is uncertain about a report, the chair may ask, "Does the historian have a report?"

Standing committees are called on for reports in the order they are listed in the by-laws. Motions arising out of these reports should be handled immediately.

5. *Reports of Special Committees.* Any special committees who are to report should be called on in the order in which they were appointed.

6. *Unfinished Business.* When the minutes show that the decision on some item of business was postponed to the present meeting or that a question from a previous meeting is pending, it should be listed on the agenda under unfinished business. The chair should not ask, "Is there any unfinished business?" but simply proceed through the items listed. An idea discussed informally at the previous meeting and agreed to be brought up at the next meeting should be included under new business.

7. *New Business.* After unfinished business is taken care of the chair asks, "Is there any new business?" At this point members may introduce new items of business. As long as members are claiming the floor to introduce business, the chair may not deprive them of their rights by hurrying through the proceedings.

8. *Announcements.* When all new business has been handled and no member wishes to bring further items to the group for consideration, the chair proceeds to announcements. However, urgent announcements may be made by the chair at any point during the meeting.

9. *Program.* The program is usually presented before the meeting is adjourned since the group may want to take action as a result of the information provided. It is acceptable to have the program at the beginning of the meeting. To move the program to an unscheduled portion of the agenda, the chair simply says, "If there are no objections, we will have our program at this time."

20.5.How to Present and Dispose of a Motion

A motion is the method by which business is brought before an assembly. Motions may grow out of reports or other communication. Often a committee report, letter, or memorandum will introduce information the assembly wishes to take action on. The procedure used in handling a motion is described by the following series of steps.

Step 1: Obtaining the Floor

Before a motion can be made, the member of the assembly first must obtain the floor; that is, the member must be recognized by the chair as having the exclusive right to

be heard. The chair must recognize any member who seeks to obtain the floor and is entitled to it. To be recognized, the member rises when no one else has the floor and addresses the presiding officer by the proper title, such as Mr. President, Madam President, or Madam Chairman. The chair normally recognizes the member by announcing the person's name or title or by saying, "The chair recognizes the member to my right." In a small group or where it is obvious only one person is seeking the floor, the chair may recognize that person by nodding to him. Once the member is recognized and has the floor, no one else may interrupt.

Step 2: Making a Motion

A member makes a motion by simply stating, "I move that" As soon as the member has stated the motion he is seated. The member will have the right to speak first in debate, if he wishes, after the chair has stated the question. If the motion has not been heard it can be repeated by the maker, the chair, or the secretary. (Motion classifications are discussed later.)

Step 3: Seconding a Motion

After a motion has been made another member seconds the motion by saying "I second the motion," or "Second." The member seconding a motion does not have to rise or obtain the floor. A second to a motion indicates that another member wishes the question to be considered by the assembly; it does not necessarily mean that he is in favor of the motion. If no one seconds a motion immediately upon its being made, the chair normally asks, "Is there a second to the motion?"

Once the motion is seconded the chair understands that there are at least two members of the assembly who wish to consider this question and he states the question, thus placing it before the assembly. The motion now belongs to the group and the maker may no longer withdraw the motion without the assembly's consent. If there is no second, the motion is not before the assembly and the chair moves on to the next item of business. Motions made by direction of a board or committee do not need a second since they are made by a majority vote within the committee and are desired by more than one member of the group.

Step 4: Debating the Motion

Immediately after the chair states the motion he should ask, "Is there any discussion?" or "Are you ready for the question?" The person making the motion has the right to speak first and should be allowed to do so. The maker of the motion is not required to speak. However, if he chooses to do so he must speak in favor of the motion. During the discussion each member has the right to speak twice on the same question. No members may speak the second time as long as another member who has not spoken on the question desires the floor. Speakers must limit their remarks to the pending question. They should address the chair, speak in a courteous tone, avoid personalities, and under no circumstances attack or question the motives of another person. The